What is claimed is:

1. A communication adapter system for connecting a client to a network, the system comprising:

a server having a memory electrically connected to the client;

a primary I/O board electrically connected to the server and having a primary network interface card (NIC), the primary NIC having a primary I/O port for connecting to the network, the primary NIC configured to enable active transfer of data from the client to the network through the primary I/O port;

a secondary I/O board electrically connected to the server and having a secondary NIC, the secondary NIC having a secondary I/O port for connecting to the network, the secondary NIC configured to disable active transfer of data from the client to the network though the secondary I/O port;

a primary switch electrically connected to the primary I/O port and the network;

a secondary switch electrically connected to the secondary I/O port and the network; and

program signals stored in the memory of the server and defining an executable program for:

generating a connectivity signal to the primary I/O switch to test connectivity at least from the primary I/O board to the primary switch;

monitoring the primary I/O port to detect a response signal within a predetermined time period after the generation of the connectivity signal;

configuring the primary NIC to disable active transfer of data if the response signal is not detected within the time period; and

configuring the secondary NIC to enable the active transfer of data if the response signal is not detected within the time period.

2. The system of Claim 1 wherein the network is an FDDI network.

3. The system of Claim 1 wherein the program comprises generating a connectivity signal to a remote device on the network to test connectivity from the primary I/O board through the primary switch and to the remote device.

4. The system of Claim 1 wherein the connectivity signal is a ping signal.

5. The system of Claim 1 wherein the program comprises transferring network information from the primary NIC to the secondary NIC.

6. The system of Claim 5 wherein the network information includes one of an IP address, a netmask, a broadcast, and a logical IP address.

7. The system of Claim 1 wherein the program comprises notifying a systems administrator of a failure.

8. A method for detecting failures in a communication adapter system for connecting a client to a network, the method comprising:

generating a connectivity signal from a primary I/O board of the system to a primary switch of the system to test connectivity at least from the primary I/O board to the primary switch;

monitoring a primary I/O port of the primary I/O board to detect a response signal within a predetermined time period after the generation of the connectivity signal;

configuring a primary NIC of the primary I/O board to disable active transfer of data from the client to the network through the primary I/O port if the response signal is not detected within the time period; and

configuring a secondary NIC of a secondary I/O board of the system to enable the active transfer of data from the client to the network through a secondary I/O port of the secondary I/O board if the response signal is not detected within the time period.

9. The method of Claim 8 wherein the network is an FDDI network.

10. The method of Claim 8 wherein generating includes generating a connectivity signal to a remote device on the network to test connectivity from the primary I/O board through the primary switch and to the remote device.

11. The method of Claim 8 wherein generating includes generating a ping signal.

12. The method of Claim 8 comprising transferring network information from the primary NIC to the secondary NIC.

13. The method of Claim 12 wherein transferring includes transferring one of an IP address, a netmask, a broadcast, and a logical IP address.

14. The method of Claim 8 comprising notifying a systems administrator of a failure.